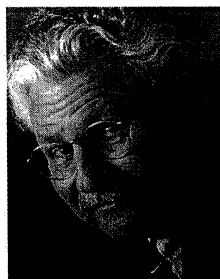


Youth Worship: What's Negotiable?

Some time ago I was asked to speak at a conference on the subject of youth worship. These people made the assumption that youth worship should be different than worship for adults. They argued for a youth worship governed by loud, louder, loudest. In short, they argued it should look like the culture of which youth are a part. Kids go to music concerts. Worship should be like a concert. Appeal to youth where they live.



I question this argument and suggest youth worship should be approached like all other worship—content, structure, and then style.

Content: God's Story

First, the content of all worship is God's story of the world, and that is not negotiable. Obviously the depth of God's story will vary. Children start with milk, and as they get older they eat carbs, fruits and vegetables, and lastly meat. The writer of Hebrews applies the principle of progressive depth when he tells adult Christians feeding on milk to "leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity" (Heb. 6:1). The content of worship for every age group is the story of the Triune God who creates, and because of our rebellion, gets involved in creation to restore it by His own two hands—the incarnate Word and Spirit. Worship is about God's incarnation into our time, space and history, His death (which is the death of death) and His resurrection (which is the beginning of the New Creation and will be fulfilled in the New Heavens and the New Earth where evil and rebellion against God will be put away forever). This story is nonnegotiable.

Structure: The Four-fold Pattern Narrates God's Story

The narrative is simple and applicable to all age groups. It is told and rehearsed in the biblical four-fold pattern.

- We gather,
- To hear God's story, (preaching)
- To enact God's story, (communion) and,
- To go forth.

There are four processions in this four-fold pattern. We process into the presence of God (gathering); God's Word processes into our life (word); we process into the heavens and celebrate the Supper of the Lamb who has conquered evil (table); we process back into the world to proclaim and live out the story of God.

There is some slight negotiation here. The fullness of worship is gathering, telling, enacting, and living. The biblical and historical precedent always includes the enactment of the story at the table. Unfortunately for many reasons table worship has been lost among many Protestants. Hopefully someday it will be restored. But probably not until Protestants turn away from worship as a program and return to worship as the narrative of God's story.

In worship we actually pray God's story over our lives and over the life of the world. Worship is not a self-generated praise of God. Rather, worship is remembering, recalling and enacting God's involvement in the history of the world for the salvation of the world. Worship

proclaims and enacts "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Prayerfully proclaiming and enacting this truth is what biblical worship is all about. There is no better ordering of this truth than Word and Table (Acts 2:42).

Style

So now we come to style. I do not relegate style to third place as if style is an afterthought. Style has to do with how the nonnegotiable story of Word and Table gets communicated in a particular context. The style of worship must be indigenous. You can do God's story in Word and Table in China, India, Africa or Iraq. Or you can do God's story in Word and Table among children, Jr. High, High Schoolers street people, Starbucks cafe junkies, or senior citizens in a nursing home. What is negotiable is the style. The same content and the same structural narrative can be done with an organ, a guitar, African drums or on a nursing home piano. Style is indigenous, somewhat relative and flexible. So let worship be worship. And let youth worship be worship of Word and Table done in the idioms of youth. Their style is okay, too. v

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- Write out the four-fold pattern of worship, then with your team, brainstorm multiple ways that each can be "styled" for the many generations in your worship service.